DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 418 390 CS 013 165

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TITLE Siblings as Mediators of Literacy in Linguistic Minority Communities.
PUB DATE 1998-04-00
NOTE 39p.
PUB TYPE Opinion Papers (120) -- Reports - Evaluative (142)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Family Influence; *Family Involvement; Foreign Countries; *Language Minorities; *Literacy; Minority Group Children; Multicultural Education; *Parent Participation; Reading Instruction; *Reading Programs; Sibling Relationship; *Siblings
IDENTIFIERS Syncretic Literacy; *United Kingdom

ABSTRACT

This paper argues for the need to move beyond the paradigm of parental involvement in reading, which presently informs home/school reading programs for linguistic minority children in the United Kingdom (UK). The first part of the paper examines the literature informing the current model showing the marked absence of studies on the role played by siblings as mediators of literacy in a new linguistic and cultural environment. The second part of the paper presents an analysis of reading sessions taking place in a group of Bangladeshi origin families living in London, England, and shows ways in which older siblings provide finely-tuned "scaffolding" closely adjusted to the reading ability of the individual child. Through a combination of ethnographic and ethnomethodological approaches, a complex syncretism of Qur'anic and school literacy practices is revealed in the interaction between child and older sibling. Finally, a comparison between home and school reading sessions shows how a more detailed knowledge by the teacher of her linguistic minority children's home reading patterns may enable her to build more successfully upon their existing learning strategies. (Contains 61 references and two figures.) (Author/CR)

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ED 418 390

SIBLINGS AS MEDIATORS OF LITERACY IN LINGUISTIC MINORITY COMMUNITIES

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ABSTRACT

This paper argues for the need to move beyond the paradigm of *parental* involvement in reading which presently informs home/school reading programmes for linguistic minority children in the UK. The first part of the paper examines the literature informing the current model showing the marked absence of studies on the role played by siblings as mediators of literacy in a new linguistic and cultural environment. The second part of the paper presents an analysis of reading sessions taking place in a group of Bangladeshi origin families living in London and shows ways in which older siblings provide finely-tuned 'scaffolding' closely adjusted to the reading ability of the individual child. Through a combination of ethnographic and ethnomethodological approaches, a complex syncretism of Qur'anic and school literacy practices is revealed in the interaction between child and older sibling. Finally, a comparison between home and school reading sessions shows how a more detailed knowledge by the teacher of her linguistic minority children's home reading patterns may enable her to build more successfully upon their existing learning strategies.

Key-words: linguistic minorities; siblings; literacy; syncretism

It is a blustery June evening when I walk towards the community building that houses the Arabic class of the Flower and Dean estate, notorious for being the site of one of Jack the Ripper's killings in East London just one hundred years ago. In this particular class there are two male teachers, one of whom is working with the more advanced children who are tackling the complicated word structures of the Qur'an. The other group consists of younger children who are in a different part of the room with the other teacher, grappling with sounds and letters and oral verse. Everyone sits on the mat swaying to the sound of his/her own voice. Although on initial appraisal the noise level seems high, little of this is idle chatter. It is the expressed wish of the teachers that children read aloud, partly to assist their learning, but more importantly so that Allah can hear. Children are encouraged to develop an harmonious recitation in unison with the gentle rocking to and fro which accompanies the reading, as they are told that Allah listens to his servants and is pleased if they take time to make their reading meaningful... 'Okay, repeat after me', the teacher solemnly requests, 'Kalimah Tayyabh, la ilaha ilallaho, mohammadan rasolallahe'. He tells them to look at him as they repeat...I leave the room on the third recitation of the prayer and notice that the children have not wavered at all; remain seated on the floor as they have done for the last hour and a half. (Rashid 1996)

Like most of her class-mates, six year old Shima will spend two hours after her English school every weekday at this class learning to read the Qur'an. Saturdays and Sundays are reserved for mother-tongue classes where she will join a small group of children to work in a neighbour's front room; all are learning to read and write in standard

Bengali, a form of the language which is considerably different from the Sylheti dialect they speak at home. Shima's parents play an important role in this part of their daughter's literacy development, although not directly teaching her themselves, they pay for her Arabic and Bengali classes, provide her with the books and writing materials needed and encourage her by showing how much they value her learning. If necessary, her mother will help her practise from her Bengali primer or recite her Arabic prayers. She has every confidence in her ability to do this, since she herself learned from the same materials as a child in Bangladesh. The parents view their contribution as essential to the children's learning; literacy in Bengali symbolises 'belonging' to the Bengali culture and is knowledge which must be passed on to future generations; reading the Qur'an is seen as necessary for entering the life hereafter which is eternal.

English literacy, however, is a very different matter for the parents in this community. Similar reasons are offered by the parents for their lack of participation in school reading programmes. First, is their very definite view that the English teacher is the expert whose professionalism they trust implicitly: '...we have no complaints because we believe the teacher has enough knowledge about the methods used'. Second, is their alienation to the reading materials sent home. In general, the parents equate learning to read with having a *moral* or *religious* purpose and are mystified by the content of the books sent home by the school. Finally, most of the parents are unable to speak, read or write English. Shabbir's mother speaks for many others when she says, 'He often brings home his reading book, but when he doesn't know a word I tell him to ask the teacher... Look, he has more sense than I do (said laughing as he

corrects an English word his mother has read)... Let's leave it, leave it to the teacher, who can help the child more, because it's too hard for us' (Gregory 1996, 37).

In this paper, I argue that we need to move beyond the paradigm of *parental* involvement in reading which currently informs home/school reading programmes for linguistic minority children. I analyse reading sessions taking place in a group of Bangladeshi origin families living in London and show how a group of older siblings act as mediators of literacy for the younger children. Finally, I suggest ways in which a knowledge by teachers of their linguistic minority children's home and community reading practices may provide a basis for more successful home/school links.

Family or Parental Involvement in Young Children's Reading Development?: The Current Paradigm

Over the past two decades numerous studies from the English speaking world point to the advantages for young children of family involvement in their literacy development. However, their emphasis has always been firmly and almost exclusively upon *parents* working with children in specific ways and often using particular school-sanctioned materials. Current models of *parental involvement in reading* in the UK are generally based on the following assumptions:

Assumption One: Parents need to perform school-devised activities using school materials and teaching methods. Successful parental involvement means that school

reading and learning practices should be transmitted from school to home. Existing home and community practices are consequently unimportant for involvement.

A number of studies in the UK point to the successful transmission of reading practices from school to home (see Hannon 1995 for a summary of these). Studies on the lack of parental involvement by lower social class parents during the 1970's (Newson & Newson 1977) coupled with evidence of unsatisfactory reading standards by their children (Bullock 1975) were also used to support a transmissionist argument, that improved performance might be achieved through involvement in school practices. A number of research studies and practical classroom projects detail particularly the improved achievements of children from lower social class backgrounds when their parents learn and take over school practices (Hewison & Tizard 1980, Tizard et al 1982, Hannon & Weinberger 1994). The assumption that only school reading practices count as valid is also furthered by research suggesting that a certain type of reading will be important to which 'non-school-oriented' families are unlikely to have access at home (see Assumption 4).

A transmissionist model is also assumed by a majority of 'family literacy' programmes taking place in the USA. These aim to target the poor literacy skills of both parent and child and often comprise workshops where parents practise how to read with their children (summarised in Nickse 1990). Nevertheless, these have been countered by considerable evidence from longitudinal ethnographic studies detailing the *different* but nevertheless extensive literacy practices taking place in non-school-oriented families of both American (Heath 1983, Anderson & Stokes 1984) and immigrant origin (see

Assumption 2 below). Arguing against a transmissionist approach, Auerbach (1989) has proposed a sociocontextual model where teachers ask: 'What strengths exist in the family and how can schools build upon them?' . Some studies detail practical projects conducted jointly by university and school staff which attempt this (Moll 1992, Gallimore & Goldenberg 1993). Similar projects are still unusual in the UK partly owing to the lack of tradition of collaborative work between anthropologists or other university-based staff and teachers and partly due to a lack of funding for longitudinal ethnographic studies. However, evidence emerging from studies on the Gujarati speaking community in Leicester (Martin-Jones, Barton, Saxena 1996) and the Cantonese speaking communities in Northampton and Reading (Edwards 1995, Gregory 1996) shows a similar variety and wealth of practices with the difference that even *very young children* are partcipating in extensive formal literacy classes outside the mainstream school. The assumption, therefore, that the school has nothing to learn from these and that only school practices are valid for home reading programmes must be seriously questioned.

Assumption 2: The same home reading programmes are suitable whether all the school is from an indigenous or first generation linguistic minority background. Parents should be capable of helping their children to complete work whether or not they read English.

Researchers in the UK have generally shown a reluctance to recognise cultural differences in the learning practices of minority group families. A number of factors might be responsible for this. Since the debate on linguistic and cognitive 'deficit' or

'difference' (Bernstein 1971, Labov 1972), researchers and teachers have been anxious to emphasise *similarities* rather than differences in language use in the homes of different social classes (Wells 1981, Tizard & Hughes 1984). A second reason may well stem from the strong British tradition of *child-centredness* in Early Years education which is focused on the child as *individual* rather than a member of a cultural or ethnic group. Finally, recent government policy in the UK stresses the need to promote a 'common culture' (Tate 1995) which will iron out cultural differences between groups. This aim is practically reinforced by the English National Curriculum (1995) which fails to acknowledge the learning practices of different minority groups. 'Equality of opportunity', a promise which is made in the Education Act of 1988, is currently interpreted as 'the same' provision. In practice, this means that families not benefitting from the 'equal opportunity' provided are viewed in terms of linguistic, cognitive or cultural deficit. Such a narrow definition of culture ignores the multiple pathways to literacy shown by both adults and children from minority groups in western societies (Baynham 1995, Luke & Kale 1997).

As a consequence, teachers in the UK are unable to draw upon the large body of studies on the literacy and learning practices of different cultural groups as their colleagues in the USA. Here teachers benefit from a tradition of research investigating continuities and discontinuities of home and school learning practices (Scollon & Scollon 1981, Heath 1983, Volk 1994, Duranti & Ochs 1996, Reese & Gallimore 1996) as well as work available on the learning styles of different cultural groups and the effect of the knowledge of these on teaching styles (Au 1980, Michaels 1986). Nevertheless, some recent studies in the UK are beginning to reveal the rich variety of

literacy practices of minority groups which may remain unknown to their children's teachers (Martin-Jones, Barton & Saxena 1996, Gregory 1996).

Assumption 3: Home reading programmes are for parental not sibling participation.

Current home reading programmes assume *parental* rather than sibling involvement in young children's reading. However, the role of siblings in children's learning has been the subject of various studies; some reveal how young children learn social and emotional skills (Dunn 1989) and cognitive skills (Cicirelli 1976) from older siblings. Others show how in non-western societies older siblings are often culture brokers who may be as influential or more influential than parents in socialising young children (Whiting & Edwards 1988, Rogoff 1990). Recent studies are beginning to highlight the special role which may be played by older siblings in linguistic minority families where parents do not speak the new language (Tharp & Gallimore 1988, Zukow 1989, Perez et al 1994, McQuillan & Tse 1995) and to suggest that the ways in which children learn from older siblings in the home environment may have implications for school learning. These studies problematise the notion that parents will be the exclusive caregivers and 'teachers' in families of all backgrounds.

Assumption 4: The story-reading practice between parent and young child as it takes place in western school-oriented homes is the most valuable preparation for children's early literacy development. Although children may participate in other

practices at home and in the community, these do not initiate children into crucial patterns for school success.

A number of longitudinal studies show how a familiarity with written narrative and story-reading promote cognitive and linguistic growth as well as preparing children for school literacy (Dombey 1983, Fox 1988). Others go further to suggest that the early reading difficulties experienced by some children may result generally from their narrative inexperience (Wells 1987) or more specifically through their lack of knowledge of when and how to provide 'what' explanations when required (Heath 1983). Studies on the type of reading taking place during Qur'anic classes (Wagner 1994) are not generally viewed as relevant to the British school context. However, whilst not denying the importance of experience of written narrative as a preparation for school, some researchers point to additional factors for early reading success, especially in socially disadvantaged areas. Tizard et al (1988) maintain that children's knowledge of the alphabet at school entry is an important determinant for achievement at 7 and Gregory (1993) argues that early success hinges on a child's ability to work out the cultural rules of classroom reading lessons.

A result of the current paradigm of *parental involvement in literacy* means that little attention has been given to the role of siblings in initiating young children into reading. The questions addressed below are: What is the nature of reading 'lessons' between young children and older siblings in Bangladeshi origin homes? How different are these from interactions between caregivers and infants during story-reading events? Do they provide children with crucial interaction patterns for school success? What should

teachers know about these interactions in order to build upon children's existing knowledge in their reading lessons?

The Setting and Subjects

The families in this study live in the neighbourhood of Spitalfields in the East London Borough of Tower Hamlets. A stone's throw to the west lie the glittering banks and businesses of the City of London; the same distance to the east the new mosque towers over rows of Victorian terraced houses and shops. Spitalfields itself has two faces: by day, the chic restaurants, pubs and snack-bars serve a white, wealthy and migratory clientele; by night, the streets come to life with children rushing in groups to their Qur'anic classes and the smell of Asian spices and food cooking for their return.

These new British originate from Sylhet, a region in the north-eastern corner of Bangladesh. Their mother-tongue is Sylheti-Bengali, a regional language which is very different from the standard form. In 1995, there were 17,151 children of Bangladeshi origin families overall in Tower Hamlets schools, just over half the school population (Tower Hamlets Strategy Group 1995). However, the children are not neatly and equally distributed. Twenty-nine schools have between 80 and 100% Bangladeshi origin pupils. Most of these will be found in Spitalfields, like the school in this study where all the children speak Sylheti-Bengali as their mother-tongue.

Four demographic factors contribute to parents' difficulties in assisting with their children's school reading and are highlighted in *Figure One*.

Figure 1 about here

First, although many of the men have lived more than twenty years in Britain, women have usually joined their husbands during the last ten years and the families remain isolated from the English language and culture. This isolation is emphasised by *patterns of employment*. The rate of unemployment for the Bangladeshi origin population in Britain is the highest for any minority group and currently rests at 25% (Skellington 1996). For families living in this area it is generally higher. None of the mothers in our study were in employment and three of the seven fathers were unemployed. Those in employment worked in the immediate area with colleagues from the same country of origin. Consequently, there was little urgency to learn to speak English. Second, the *educational level* of Bangladeshi mothers meant that, although literate in Bengali, only one was able to read or write English. Third, the cramped *accommodation* of the families meant that the mothers were constantly occupied in domestic chores of keeping order, tidying after the children etc. Finally, the number of *older siblings* who were familiar with the school books meant that they were more suitable 'teachers' for the younger children.

The Children

The seven children had their sixth birthday during the year that data was collected. They were all in the same Year 1 class; this is the first year that children follow the English National Curriculum although these children had all attended the reception class for the whole of the year before. All the children regularly attended Arabic and

Bengali community classes although parents differed in their preference for mosque or Bengali school *(see Figure 2)*.

Figure 2 about here

Although there were a variety of venues in which classes took place (from living-rooms to purpose-built school), classes generally followed a very similar pattern (children are first tested on past work then go on to learn through *listening, repeating, practising and being tested*) and each class lasted two hours without a break. After classes and a meal, there was limited time for recreation. The television - often a powerful medium for cultural integration - still took second place to videos in Hindi which could be shared by all the family. In the summer, children might play for a while with their class-mates in the yard outside their flats. Within this full schedule, reading with older siblings played a regular yet private role.

The Study

Aims, Methods and Data Collection

The findings presented below are drawn from a much larger bank of data collected from fourteen families and two classrooms during one year. In fact, we did not originally set out to investigate the role of older siblings in young children's reading development when planning this research. Our work had a wider remit which aimed: a) to examine the reading histories and current practices of both indigenous English and Bangladeshi origin families with 5 year old children in 2 adjacent schools and to compare these with reading practices in the English schools; b) to analyse the extent

and ways in which the children transfer reading strategies from home to school and vice versa. Our research team comprised two staff from the local University and two part-time research assistants (one bilingual Sylheti-Bengali). We had all been teachers ourselves and were very familiar with both the area and the schools. Using a combination of methods from ethnography (participant observation, interviews, life histories etc.) (Hammersley & Atkinson 1983) and ethnomethodology (conversation analysis) (Mishler 1975), we aimed to collect emic definitions of 'reading' held by the families and teachers as well as observe and analyse reading taking place between parents, English and community class teachers and the children at home and at school.

Our original research plans quickly proved to be unrealistic, since *none* of the Bangladeshi origin parents normally read at home with their children. However, as *all* of the children read regularly with an older sibling, one audio-recording of such an occasion was collected in addition to the data below:

a) one/two recorded reading sessions with the class/group teacher

b) one recorded interview with the child

c) three parental interviews

d) field-notes from each child's Bengali and Qur'anic class

Interviews were also conducted with the two teachers involved in the project and the school site managers both of whom had worked for more than twenty years in the schools. Data on the general history of the area and changing migration patterns were also collected through secondary sources.

Data Analysis

The method of multi-layering (Bloome & Theodorou 1987) was used. This approach enabled us to examine the social context within which individual functioning is embedded (in-depth ethnographic analyses), individual teaching strategies and the role of the child in negotiating interactions (conversation analysis). The ethnographic analysis revealed patterns of similarity and difference between the history and current practices of the two schools; the interpretation of reading of the two groups of families and the teachers; the histories and current reading practices of the three group and the views on the role of parents and teachers in their children's reading development of the indigenous English and Bangladeshi origin families and the teachers. The analysis of interaction during book reading sessions occurring regularly at home used an adaptation of conversation analysis techniques adapted from Mishler 1975, Williams et al 1982. This enabled us to examine how joint cognitive activity in the form of 'scaffolding' (Wood, Bruner & Ross 1976) or 'guided participation' (Rogoff 1990) took place whereby the sibling gave finely-tuned tuition whilst the child was active in managing the pace and nature of the interaction.

In this approach we plotted *moves* (turns made by individuals) and *exchanges* (a move plus a response) made between sibling/young child dyads into simple trees e.g.

12	*Sib*	*R1*	*gave*
13	*Ch*	*Rpt1*	*gave*
.....			
238	*Sib*	*R2*	*with lots*
239	*Ch*	*Rpt.1 + R2*	*with lobs of windows*

We then compared the nature of 'scaffolding' at home with reading sessions between the teacher and individual children at school. Finally, we asked: What might teachers

learn from the siblings for classroom practice? Are the siblings really very different 'teachers' from 'school-oriented' parents?

The nature of 'scaffolding' by older siblings

What is the nature of 'scaffolding' by older siblings as they read with the six year olds who are just starting to read in their Qur'anic, Bengali and English classes? In the examples below, the children have taken home either their school reading book or a book of their choice to practise.

Stage One

During this stage, children need most support in their reading. Strategies used by sibling and young child are typified by both a very high number of moves and fast and smooth exchanges.

Strategy One: Listen and Repeat

Type A: Here the child at first repeats exactly the words of the older sibling. In the case below the sibling starts by reading one word which builds up to six by the end. After a period of word-for-word repetition, the younger child is confident enough to add one or two words. Here is Uzma reading with her 8 year old sister:

	Child	*Sibling*
12		*gave*
13	*gave*	
14		*her*
15	*her*	
16		*fishy*
17	*fishy*	
18		*gifts*
19	*gifts*	

This continues for 200 turns until Uzma feels confident enough to add one or two words:

238		*with lots*
239	*lobs of windows*	

240 *or a*
241 or a carpet
242 *What else could it be?*
243 What else could it be?...triangle

.....

250 *little*
251 little triangle
252 *How many big triangles?*
253 How many big triangles are there?

.....

Towards the end of the session this disappears, but the number of words repeated at one go increases to six. During this session, 216 exchanges take place and Uzma repeats 423 words. The pattern of exchanges is simple and distinct:

12 Sib R 1
13 Ch Rpt 1
14 Sib R 1
15 Ch Rpt 1
16 Sib R 1
17 Ch Rpt 1

This then becomes:

238 Sib R 2
239 Ch Rpt1+R2
240 Sib R 2
241 Ch Rpt2+R1
242 Sib R 5
241 Ch Rpt5+R1

Later, these additions disappear, but the phrases repeated become longer:

418 Sib R 4
419 Ch Rpt 4

The ratio of number of exchanges to number of words spoken by the child is 1:1.95. Thus we see a very firm 'scaffolding' where there is no pressure on the child to take over any more reading than she is confident in managing; nevertheless, she is allowed to continue the text where she is confident to do so.

Type B

A different version of 'Listen and Repeat' occurs when children try to repeat longer chunks of the sibling reading, but often manage only telegraphic speech. This typifies Shima's approach as she reads with her 14 year old sister (underlined denotes repeat):

	Child	Sibling
28		*Peace at last*
29	*Peace in last*	
30		*The hour*
31	*The hour*	
32		*was late*
33	*was late*	
34		*Mr. Bear was tired*
35	*was tired*	

.....

40		*So they all went to bed*
41	*all went*	
42		*To bed*
43	*to bed*	

Occasionally, comments in Sylheti are interspersed: *Child: Then the...okhta name lagena, funne baroi (this doesn't close, does it, water comes out...)* . Again, we see a very high number of exchanges during one session (127) and Shima repeats 327 words. The 'scaffolding' is also firm with a ratio of just 2.53 words spoken to every exchange.

The pattern of exchanges is simple:

30	*Sib*	*R*	*2*
31	*Ch*	*Rpt*	*2*
32	*Sib*	*R*	*4*
33	*Ch*	*Rpt*	*2*
34	*Sib*	*R*	*4*
35	*Ch*	*Rpt*	*3*

'Listen and Repeat' shares much in common with the children's Qur'anic and Bengali classes. However, there are some distinct differences: there is *no insistence on*

accuracy and *children have the freedom to predict the next piece of text if they are able to do so.*

Strategy 2: Tandem Reading

This strategy is typified by the child *echoing* the siblings words (saying them just a second later) as well as telegraphic speech. The difference between *repeating* and *echoing* lies essentially in the child's familiarity with the words and confidence in saying them. Repeating takes place when the text is unknown; the child listens carefully to the whole word and then repeats. Echoing takes place when the child is already familiar with the text and could probably produce most of the words echoed alone if requested. This approach is used by Henna and her 12 year old brother (bold speech denotes echoing):

	Child	*Sibling*
6.		*The postman*
7.	***The postman***	
8.		*It was Tum's birthday*
9.	***was...birthday***	
10.		*Ram made*
11.	*Ram made*	
12.		*him a birthday card*
13.	***him a birthday card***	

.....

20.		*I want to eat something*
21.	***I want to eat something***	
22.		*Then they had some cake and everyone was very happy*
23.	***Then they had some cake...***	

This continues for 28 exchanges where 95 words are echoed by the child.

The pattern of exchanges is as follows:

8.	*Sib.*	*R*	*4*
9.	*Ch.*	*Ech*	*2*
10.	*Sib.*	*R*	*2*
11.	*Ch.*	*Rpt*	*2*
12.	*Sib.*	*R*	*4*
13.	*Ch.*	*Ech*	*4*
20.	*Sib.*	*R*	*5*
21.	*Ch.*	*Ech*	*5*
22.	*Sib.*	*R*	*10*
23.	*Ch.*	*Ech*	*5*

The ratio of exchanges to the number of words spoken by the child is 1: 3.39. During this excerpt of '*Tandem Reading*' we see clearly how the 'scaffolding' by the sibling is very slowly being removed as Henna grows in confidence. There is still a strong reliance on repetition; nevertheless, her echoed phrases grow in length throughout the piece. There is still no interruption to the fast and rhythmical flow of words through any insistence on accuracy by the sibling.

Stage 2

Stage 2 is marked by the child's independent reading. We see the way in which the role of repetition changes as well as the change in attitude towards *accuracy*.

Strategy 3: Chained Reading

Here, the sibling begins reading and the child continues; reading the next one, two or three words until s/he needs help again. Then the sibling reads the next word and the pattern recurs. Here is Akhlak and his 13 year old sister (underline denotes repeat):

	Child	Sibling
34		*Okhta (this one)*
35		*It's*
36	*It's a whobber. Meg...*	
37		*Mog*
38	*Mog catched a fish*	
39		*caught*
40	*caught a fish*	

.....

44	*They cook*	
45		*cooked*
46	*cooked a fish*	
47		*and*
48	*and Owl had a rest. Meg was looking*	
49		*looked out*

In this excerpt, there are 31 exchanges and the child reads 93 words. The pattern of exchanges is as follows:

35	*Sib.*	*R*	*1*			
36	*Ch.*	*Rpt*	*1*	*-*	*R*	*3*
37	*Sib.*	*Cor*	*1*			
38	*Ch.*	*Rpt Cor*	*1*	*-*	*R*	*3*
39	*Sib.*	*Cor*	*1*			
40	*Ch.*	*Rpt Cor*	*1*	*-*	*R*	*2*
41	*Sib.*	*R*	*1*			
42	*Ch.*	*Rpt.*	*1*	*-*	*R*	*2*

The ratio of exchanges to the number of words read by the child is 3 : 1. Chained reading is typified by the new insistence on accuracy by the older sibling and the way the young child *always repeats the siblings's correction* before going on to read the next few words alone. This feature will be important when we come to compare with classroom reading sessions.

Strategy Four: Almost Alone

The main differences between this strategy and *'Chained Reading'* are that here the child initiates the reading and manages to read larger pieces of txt before assistance is

needed. Here we see Maruf reading with his 11 year old sister Jamilla (sibling's correction and child's repetition underlined):

	Child	*Sibling*
1	*Don't eat the postman. It was Tom's*	
2		*Tum's*
3	*Tum's birthday. Ram made him a birthday card. 'Don't eat the birthday card' said Ram. 'But it is my birthday' shouted Tum. 'I want some, I ...*	
4		*something*
5	*something to eat. Tum was*	
6		*saw*
7	*saw some beetles. 'Don't eat the beetles' said Ram. Tum w-saw a...*	
8		*rat*
9	*rat. 'Don't eat the rat' said Ran*	
10		*Ram*

Here we see just how independent the child has become; during five exchanges, Maruf reads 116 words. The pattern of exchanges is as follows:

1	*Ch.*	*R*	*7*
2	*Sib.*	*Cor*	*1*
3	*Ch.*	*Rpt 1 + R*	*25*
4	*Sib.*	*Cor*	*1*
5	*Ch.*	*Rpt. 1 + R*	*4*
6	*Sib.*	*Cor*	*1*
7	*Ch*	*Rpt 1 + R*	*11*

8	*Sib.*	*R*	*1*
9	*Ch.*	*Rpt 1 + R*	*6*
10	*Sib.*	*Cor*	*1*

The ratio of exchanges to the number of words read by the child is 1 : 23.2. What stands out powerfully in this excerpt is the way the child always repeats the sibling's correction before going on to read another passage independently.

The Recital

This strategy is where children recite a complete piece to the older sibling using a melodious intonation which is reminiscent of the way they might recite a prayer in Arabic. This is Shanaz with her 11 year old brother:

	Child	*Sibling*
3	*10 pink piglet walkin' on the wall (repeats) and one pink piglet should accilently fall, there be 9 pink piglet walkin' on the wall, (repeats refrain twice), and one pink piglet should accilently fall, there be 7 pink piglet walkin' on the wall (repeats refrain twice), and one pink piglet should accilently fall, there be...*	
4		*six*
5	*six pink piglet walkin' on the wall (repeats refrain twice) and one pink piglet should accilently fall, there be five pink piglet walkin' on the wall (repeats refrain twice) and one pink piglet should accilently fall, there be...*	
6		*four*
7	*Four pink piglet... (continues to end)*	

There are but four exchanges here and Shanaz reads *258* words making the ratio of exchanges to the number of words read by the child 1: 64. It is unclear how much of the text Shanaz understands. On the one hand, the illustrations leave little to the imagination; on the other, it is obvious that *reading the words themselves* rather than considering meaning is the aim of both child and older sibling in this interaction.

Stage Three

Until now, child and sibling have focused entirely on *reading* the text and there has been no discussion of the texts at all.

Strategy Six: Talk about Text

This strategy moves from actual reading to questions on the text. These are typified by being very *directed to the text itself.* They also *follow* the reading of the text rather than accompany it. The sibling asks all the questions and sometimes asks the child to explain an English word in Sylheti. If the child is wrong, the correct answer is given and the child repeats it immediately. Here is Maruf with his eldest sister who is eighteen and waiting to attend College. Maruf's reading is the most advanced in the group. He has just read the story of Tum's birthday making few errors:

(this interaction takes place in Sylheti)

	Child	*Sibling*
6.		*What's his name? (from illustration)*
7.	*Tum. And Ram made him a card*	
8.		*And what did he say?*
9.	*Don't eat that*	
10.		*What shouldn't he eat?*
11.	*Birthday cake*	
12.		*Card*
13.	*Card. Not to eat birthday card.*	

To summarise, we find that the younger children's strategies are characterised by the following:

1. repeating word by word or phrase by phrase, sometimes anticipating the next word(s)
2. echoing words and phrases, sometimes resulting in 'telegraphic speech'
3. always repeating a word after being corrected before continuing
4. no hesitation in joining in

The older sibling's strategies are characterised by the following:

1. sustaining a fast-flowing pace

2. providing a firm 'scaffold' which is only very gradually removed (the older child at first expects repetition or echoing of one word only which gradually increases as the younger child gains in confidence)

3. expecting a high level of accuracy after the initial stage which is reinforced by frequent (though not constant) correction of the younger child

4. allowing (perhaps expecting) the younger child to repeat a word correctly before continuing reading

5. a total lack of evaluative comment e.g. 'good girl/boy' etc.

6. explicit 'modelling' but a complete lack of questioning during the reading of the text

7. text-based questions with right or wrong answers (display questions) following the reading.

The whole interaction is characterised by a high number of exchanges with no breakdown in communication. Exchanges take place rhythmically with a musical synchrony reminiscent of movements between parent and very young infant described by Trevarthan (1995). But to what extent are these children able to transfer their strategies into school and in what ways might teachers build upon these in the English classroom?

Reading at School

Like the older siblings, the teacher also listens to children read individually. However, the firm 'scaffolding' and security the siblings provide is missing during teacher/child reading sessions. The teacher does not *provide words and phrases* for the children to

repeat and echo until they can gradually predict for themselves;instead, she questions themon phonics or the text or requires them to relate a text to their own life experience whilst reading. The overall picture is that children are expected to put on a complete performance without previous rehearsal. In other words, they are being tested *before* being taught. The result is that the swift and rhythmic flow taking place between siblings is absent and interactions are often truncated (without resolution). Crucially, the teacher expects her pupils to be able to understand and work within four rules which are beyond their previous experience and their knowledge of English. Examples illustrate this briefly below:

Rule One: Understand that the 'repeat' move is reversed; the teacher is likely to repeat a word after you. This is not a correction to be repeated again; it simply means 'continue reading'.

This is, perhaps, the most difficult strategy for the young child to learn as the 'repeat after me' strategy characterises Qur'anic, Bengali and sibling 'lessons'. By repeating the child's last word, the teacher also places responsibility on the child to take the initiative and start reading again (underlining highlights teacher repetition).

Example: Teacher repeats after child:

	Child	*Teacher*
19		*O.K. Point to the words like you did last time*
20	*(There) string*	
21		*string*
22	*string . (0) on the (.) upstairs*	
23		*upstairs*

Rule Two: Try to use phonic strategies to work out words or try to predict words anyway

In the interaction below, the teacher subtly changes her question from 'What (letter) does that start with? to 'What does that say?' The child appears not to understand that on one occasion the letter and on another the whole word is required. This pattern also denies the child the opportunity first to repeat after the adult and is very different from home reading sessions:

Example:

	Child	*Teacher*
23		*What letter does that word start with?*
24	*F*	
25		*What does that start with?*
26	*M*	
27		*What is that? (5.0) (child does not respond) M- ma*
28	*(5.0) Mat*	
29		*What does that say? Last page. (2.0) (child does not respond) Go on.*
30	*String on the cat*	

Rule Three: Understand and respond to comprehension questions on the text

The teacher asks the child to interpret the story, giving her own opinion e.g. using 'Why do you think...?' This is unfamiliar to the children in their home/community class setting. Again, the child must take the initiative to recommence reading.

	Child	*Teacher*
10		*Why did he put the flour on the car? (5.0) (child does not respond) Why do you think he put the flour on the car?*
11	*He was playing*	
12		*Playing? Why do you think he was playing? Pretending that the flour is?*
13	*Snow*	
14		*Snow! I think you're right.*

Rule Four: Relate the text to your own life experiences

This type of question is not familiar to the child at home or in community classes. Again, the teacher expects the child to understand and take responsibility for the choice 'little or lot?' and tries to repeat the word spoken by the child.

	Child	*Teacher*
45		*O.K. How many times did you read this book?*
46	*I don't know*	
47		*Little bit or a lot?*
48	*Last*	
49		*Hmm?*
50	*Last*	
51		*Lots? O.K. Shima, thank you.*
52	*Little*	
53		*Only little? Thank you.*

Given the solid structure of the 'scaffolding' taking place at home, it is not surprising that these children cannot automatically understand and obey the 'reading rules' required by the school.

Looking back to infant story-reading: Some ways ahead for home and school reading programmes

As teachers and researchers, we have much to learn from these reading sessions between siblings. Hitherto, researchers have tended to view the reading interaction patterns of 'school-oriented' and 'non-school-oriented' groups as being very different. We have examples to show how the young child from non-western or 'non-mainstream' (Heath 1982) parents may repeat word-by-word after the older sibling (Scollon and Scollon 1981) or syllable-by-syllable after the caregiver (Schieffelin and Cochran-Smith 1984) or the caregiver may insist on specific labelling of objects (Heath

& Branscombe 1984). In contrast, 'school-oriented' western parents initiate their infants into 'book-reading cycles' (Ninio & Bruner 1978) whereby they 'tutor' their infants to subscribe to a 'contract of literacy' (Snow & Ninio 1986). By school age, Heath (1982) maintains that 'mainstream' children have learned a number of crucial interaction patterns for school success; the most important being 'what' explanations (learning to pick out topic sentences, breaking down a story into small bits of information and handling sets of related skills in isolated sequential hierarchies).

However, when we look to studies focusing on 'mainstream' caregivers and young infants, we find examples which show interaction patterns which are remarkably similar to those between our siblings. Notably, we see ways in which a) the child echoes words and phrases using 'telegraphic speech' *(tandem reading)* b) the child anticipates and supplies appropriate words and phrases, especially 'key words' *(chained reading)* or c) the child tries to 'chunk' the caregiver's language through imitation *(Listen and Repeat B)*. Even by the age of four, we see how George's mother (from Unsworth & O'Toole 1993), although beginning to use questions on the text, still allows him to fall back on repeating and echoing etc. as he reads from *'The Tale of Peter Rabbit'*:

Mother: *Once upon a <u>time</u>*
George: *<u>time</u>*
Mother: *There were four <u>little</u> ...*
George: *<u>little</u> bunnies*
Mother: *And their names <u>were</u> ...what?*
George: *<u>were</u> Flopsy, Mopsy, Cottontail, Peter Rabbit*
Is Peter Rabbit in this picture?
Mother: *Yes, he is*
George: *Where?*
Mother: *He's looking at us, isn't he?*
George: *That one, there?*
Mother: *Do you think that one's him? (George nods)*

* * * * * * * * * * *

M: *What are their names?*
G: *Flopsy, Mopsy and Cottontail*
M: *Where are they putting the blackberries when they've picked them?*
G: *(pointing to the picture) In the basket.*
M: *(reads) But Peter was very*
G: *was very naughty*
M: *Ran straight away*
G: *away to Mr. McGregor's*
M: *Yes and he squeezed under*
G: *under the gate*
M: *That's it. Turn the page (whispered)*

May it be, therefore, that the differences in interaction between caregivers from a variety of backgrounds are not so great as previously believed? Examples from a variety of activity settings in non-western cultures show us how children learning skills only 'practice what they already know' (Cole 1985). Certainly, the syncretic literacy we witness above whereby siblings blend features from their Qur'anic classes with those introduced by their teachers show considerable similarity with transcripts available of parents with much younger infants learning their mother-tongue. Examples of 24 month old monolingual infants sharing books with their mothers (Doake 1985, Baghban in Gibson 1989) show clearly how the children carefully listen, repeat, echo and finally predict words just like the older emergent bilinguals in this study.

Teachers, too, stand to learn much from the siblings which may inform both their classroom practice and home reading programmes. The siblings know from their own experience that these young beginners to literacy in a new language cannot run before they walk; school-like strategies are used but only later *when the child is confident enough to tackle them*. Repeating, echoing and choral work initially seems alien to many Early Years teachers in Britain. Yet such approaches occur easily during small group work where the teacher orchestrates the 'scaffolding' given by children to peers

in the group. Family reading programmes, too, might begin by finding out what *actually* takes place at home rather than assuming parental involvement where it might be inappropriate. Children like those in our group above owe much to the energy, devotion and tenacity of the older children in their family; it is up to us as teachers and researchers to reveal the intricacies of such finely-tuned scaffolding and build upon it in our reading lessons.

This research was supported by the Economic and Social Research Council 1994-5 (R 000 22 1186). I should like to acknowledge the help of Ann Williams and Nasima Rashid, research officers for the project, in preparing this paper and to thank the families, schools and above all the two teachers in whose classrooms this research took place.

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Figure One

FAMILY BACKGROUND

1. Bangladeshi origin families

	Position in Family	Father's Occupation	Mother's Education	Accommodation
Uzma	4/5	Restaurant-owner	Grade 5	flat
Maruf	5/5	Shop worker	Grade 5	double flat
Shima	5/5	Unemployed	Grade 5	house
[redacted]	2/4	Waiter	to age 15	flat
[redacted]	9/11	Unemployed	Grade 7	flat
[redacted]	3/4	Unemployed	Grade 4	flat
Shanaz	2/3	Factory owner	Grade 5	flat

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Figure Two

Community Class Attendance

	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT	SUN
Maruf	B	B	B	B	B	A	A
Akhlak	A	A	A	A	A	B	B
Shuma	B	B	B	B	A	A	
Henna	A	A	A	A	B	B	
Shima	A	A	A	A	B	B	
Uzma	A	A	A	A	A	B	B

(Duration of lessons = 2 hours)

Shahnaz is awaiting her sixth birthday before starting Bengali and Arabic classes.

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